

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Personal Involvement

by

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When the long-range planning committee met on July 10 of this year, we talked of our **strengths, weaknesses, problems and opportunities**. Significantly, I think, the very first strength that was voiced was that we have survived for 25 years because we've done most things right. As the less-than-hoped-for attendance at this meeting directs us toward unspoken judgments--although now is a time for collective congratulations on what has been for the past 25 years--I think now is also the time to say out loud that there is a threatening cloud over us.

Peter Drucker has said that executives are continuously confronted by the need to answer two questions: Are we doing things right and are we doing the right things? This Society likewise has the need to answer those same two questions. Defining and implementing long-range plans may be the beginning of "doing the right things." Let's hope so!

A significant **weakness** that surfaced during the long-range planning committee session was stated as follows: "There is a small and dwindling pool of interested people." Ladies and gentlemen, this society cannot survive with a dwindling pool of interested people. Ray Kroc (of MacDonald's hamburger fame) once wrote: "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not: unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not: the world is full of educated derelicts. **Persistence and determination** alone are omnipotent!" Persistence and determination are where we are right now--there isn't any cavalry to come riding in. I sat amongst you and applauded with enthusiasm when my Boston pal Ted Leed was inducted as our first president in 1968--I applauded with even greater enthusiasm when my fellow company worker Don O'Neil at Grand Union was inaugurated as our second president. For years I displayed with pride my framed "Charter Member" certificate. Frankly, that pride has dimmed--what has happened to us? What have we let happen to us?

Some of us will remember an organization of the mid-seventies called the "Grocery Industry Pallet Council"--a dedicated group, not unlike our own. The Pallet Council had a short life cycle: it flourished, it struggled, it died with a whimper.

Let me make something emphatically clear. I did not seek or accept the high privilege of being your 26th president only to preside over the demise of our Soci-

ety. We are in a period of adjustment. The grand malaise is curable. During tough times committed people come forward, committed people survive. Commitment means I'll get it done. I pledge to be a committed president.

As a first step, I am immediately forming a "Council of Past Presidents." There are seventeen past presidents that collectively are one of our greatest resources. I intend to seek their advice and involvement.

As a second step, I will ask the Board of Directors to recommend to the membership a change in the by-laws, extending the term of office of president to two years (starting with my successor). In my opinion, there is much to recommend this continuity.

As a third step, I will investigate, and if the facts warrant it, I will recommend to the Board that this Society hire a professional "association management firm" to oversee the month-to-month flow of our activities. Such an organization would be accountable to the president and the executive committee and through them to you, the membership. A dwindling pool of Jarvis Cains, Sy Triebs, and Charlie Coales are not enough any more.

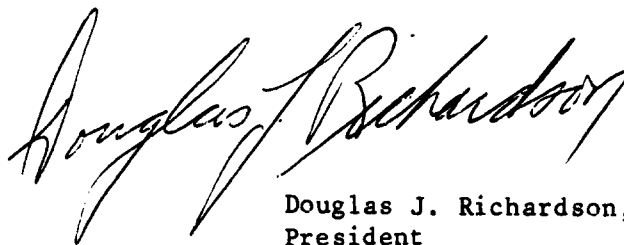
As a fourth step, I will investigate, and if the facts warrant it, I will recommend to the Board that this Society restructure its current status in order to facilitate our being joined to another larger/stronger association or society.

I would draw to your attention that I did not use the word merge--what I envision is an entity where FDRS would be "associated with" so-and-so, while retaining our integrity as a legitimate organization with a bona fide constituency. What some of you may feel are drastic initiatives, I now believe are necessary.

As a fifth step, I will work closely with our former president, Jim Ritchie, as he leads the efforts of the newly formed long-range planning committee. It is with and through this body that we may indeed emerge as a more clearly defined and therefore stronger organization. Hal Ricker deserves our praise for taking this initiative and Jim Ritchie our thanks for leading it.

In conclusion, I am not frightened by the challenges, but I am frightened by the potential conclusions. We have a proud past and a less clear future; but we do have a future. I request--I plead--for your interested involvement. We cannot move forward with a faltering momentum. Now, we can probably survive by staying with the status quo; is that enough for you? I have made a number of pledges. We are entering a year of "personal involvement." I close by asking the question, "How important is the Food Distribution Research Society to you personally?" I await your answer.

Thank you,



Douglas J. Richardson, Jr.
President